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SUBJECT: Scenesetter for President Carter: U.S. Engagement in Ecuador

¶1. Embassy Quito warmly welcomes former President Carter to Ecuador on April 27-29. Your visit comes at a time of change, as Ecuador prepares to install new national and local officials elected on April 26 and restructures its government institutions under the 2008 constitution. The Embassy's objective is to continue a partnership with Ecuador in areas where we have shared interests. The information in this cable on USG engagement in Ecuador is designed to complement the background paper you received from the Department of State, which summarized political and economic developments.

¶2. The United States and Ecuador cooperate closely in many areas to address common priorities, such as poverty reduction, job creation, counternarcotics efforts, agricultural development, emergency preparedness, environmental protection, and strengthening democracy. In 2008, the USG spent more than \$42 million on development, security, and other programs in Ecuador.

#### DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

¶3. The U.S. government has supported Ecuador's development since 1962, working especially through USAID in education, health and family planning, environment, agriculture, micro-enterprise, alternative development, and economic growth. USAID's current programs focus on strengthening democracy at the central and municipal levels, creating jobs and increasing incomes for poor people, and helping Ecuadorians improve their management of their rich biologically diverse heritage.

¶4. USAID's broader poverty reduction program promotes trade and competitiveness and encourages civil society and the private sector to participate in economic reforms. The policy work is linked to support productive clusters that bring together small and medium enterprises to improve their product quality and access to new markets. In FY 2008, the 23 value chain clusters co-founded by USAID created 3,000 new jobs.

¶5. Ecuador is one of the most biologically diverse countries in the world, so USAID's environmental programs focus on management of the National System of Protected Areas, indigenous territories, watersheds, and coastal lowlands and mangroves. The program seeks to create economic benefits for communities in and around protected areas, providing the means and motivation for better conservation. It also seeks to improve the infrastructure of protected areas and create job opportunities in flood-prone areas. In FY 2008, USAID assistance helped improve management of 65,974 hectares of critical ecosystems.

¶6. In addition to USAID activities, the United States Military Group has been constructing a number of Emergency Operation Centers strategically located throughout Ecuador for GOE use, and provides other humanitarian aid as well. The Department of Agriculture is continuing to implement 31 agricultural aid programs that benefit more than 42,000 small farmers in 18 of Ecuador's provinces. Additionally it provides a short-term, practical training program for Ecuadorian agricultural professionals.

## SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY

¶17. Supporting Ecuadorian efforts to strengthen democratic institutions and respect for democratic norms is one of our highest priorities in Ecuador. The United States is continuing long-term efforts to help build the technical capacity of central and local government institutions, support civil society oversight efforts and the rule of law, and enhance anti-corruption efforts. Specifically, USAID supports local governments to implement participatory planning processes and to improve their municipal management practices. It has provided more than 10,000 persons from vulnerable groups access to legal defense services and legal assistance in nine cities. Additionally the Embassy's Narcotics Affairs Section is strengthening the capacity of justice sector institutions by providing programs and workshops that reinforce criminal justice professionals' knowledge and skills regarding the accusatorial trial system.

¶18. USAID supports civil society efforts to carry out oversight of local and national elections and of institutional restructuring under the new constitution. It also assists in the participation of people with disabilities in democratic processes, promoting people with disabilities in the workforce, and combating trafficking in persons through trafficking prevention and victim protection activities.

## NORTHERN BORDER

¶19. Ecuador shares a 450-mile porous border with Colombia. USG efforts in the area aim to prevent spillover of drug cultivation and trafficking and illegal armed group activity into Ecuador. They include development assistance to improve the quality of life and spur licit economic growth; counter-narcotics aid to curb smuggling of precursor chemicals, cocaine, and heroin; and military-to-military assistance to strengthen Ecuador's ability to secure its Northern Border and control its territorial waters.

¶110. The Military Group provides counterdrug assistance by executing Department of Defense and NAS-funded programs to help the Ecuadorian military enhance its operational capacity in the northern border region. The Ecuadorian military's First Joint Task Force (formerly Fourth Army Division) has engaged the FARC in a series of operations along the border and has increased its presence with additional personnel and assets. The First Joint Task Force has taken the lead in efforts to control the Northern Border area and to remove incursions of armed insurgents within its territory by increasing the intensity of its operations.

¶111. USAID programs aim to increase the economic and social development of both the northern and southern border populations, which provides legitimate economic alternatives. It generates job opportunities and licit income, strengthens local government capacity, and improves the production and marketing of local production chains both nationally and internationally. To date nearly a million inhabitants on the southern and northern borders have benefited from new bridges, roads, water and sewage, garbage recycling, and irrigation systems. Incomes from most participating farmers have more than doubled and approximately 11,000 new jobs have been created.

¶112. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates there are at least 135,000 persons of concern in the northern provinces of Ecuador who have fled Colombia due to violence or threat of violence.

In FY 2008 and 2009, the State Department provided funding for refugees in Ecuador to UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the World Food Program, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Catholic Relief Services, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and the American Red Cross. UNHCR carries out direct assistance projects to foster development, while IOM focuses on emergency assistance and local capacity building.

## COUNTER-NARCOTICS COOPERATION

¶113. Ecuadorian leaders have identified narcotics traffickers and other criminal organizations as threats to national sovereignty, and are focusing the police, military, judiciary, and others on disrupting and dismantling these organizations. Since 2001, the Embassy's Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) has provided almost \$100 million to enhance the capacity of the anti-narcotics police

throughout Ecuador, assist the military in providing security for citizens and protecting Ecuador's sovereignty on the northern and maritime border, and improve the criminal justice system.

¶14. The Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) is also involved in counternarcotics activities in Ecuador. DEA activities provide infrastructure works for the Ecuadorian National Police and information sharing on large drug-trafficking networks.

¶15. The U.S. Forward Operating Location (FOL) in Manta, Ecuador is an important asset in our regional counter-narcotics efforts. Flights from the FOL conduct counter-narcotics surveillance in the eastern Pacific. Embassy efforts over the past two years to educate the Ecuadorian public about the FOL and its benefits have reduced misperceptions and negative views, especially in Manta itself, but were complicated by the March 1, 2008, Colombian incursion into Ecuador. On July 29, 2008, the GOE sent a diplomatic note notifying the United States that it will not extend the agreement when it expires on November 11, 2009. The United States is now planning its withdrawal from the facility.

#### PEACE CORPS

¶16. Ecuador hosts one of our oldest Peace Corps programs in the region, which started in 1962. Approximately 160 volunteers serve throughout the country. Program areas include natural resource conservation, community health, sustainable agriculture, and youth and family development. The volunteers also carry out projects and training in youth entrepreneurship and leaderships, HIV/AIDS and trafficking in persons (TIP) awareness and prevention education, micro-enterprise and community banking development, and gender equality education.

#### HODGES